DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 356 440 CG 024 835

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TITLE Parental Hostility, Adolescent High Standards, and Self-Esteem.
PUB DATE 93
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (65th, Chicago, IL, April 29-May 1, 1993).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS College Students; Higher Education; *Hostility; Individual Characteristics; Parent Child Relationship; *Parents; *Self Esteem; Standards; *Young Adults

ABSTRACT

Studies employing the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-based Cook and Medley (1954) Hostility (Ho) Scale have suggested that Hostility may be a robust psychological disposition with pervasive implications for interpersonal functioning. For example, when compared to individuals who scored low in Ho, high Ho individuals were more suspicious, more anger-prone, and more irritable. This study investigated whether the self esteem (SE) levels of adolescents having high personal standards are more vulnerable to the deleterious effects of parental Ho than are the SE levels of those who do not hold high standards of personal performance. Subjects were 69 college students from intact families and both of their parents. College student subjects completed a global self-esteem questionnaire; a questionnaire measuring high personal standards, and a demographic information sheet. Parents filled out the Ho scale. The results indicated that mothers' and fathers' hostility were inversely related to their adolescents' self-esteem. High standards held by the adolescents for their own behaviors were not related to their self-esteem; however, these high standards had strong cognitive moderating effects, magnifying the deleterious consequences for adolescent self-esteem. (Author/ABL)

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Parental Hostility, Adolescent High Standards, and Self-Esteem

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Abstract: *Mothers' and fathers' hostility [measured by the Cook and Medley (1954) Hostility Scale] were inversely related to their adolescents' self-esteem. High standards held by the adolescents for their own behaviors were not related to their self-esteem; however, these high standards had strong cognitive moderating effects, magnifying the deleterious consequences of fathers' hostility for adolescent self-esteem.*

Studies employing the MMPI-based Cook and Medley (1954) Hostility (Ho) Scale have suggested that Hostility may be a robust psychological disposition with pervasive implications for interpersonal functioning. For example, when compared to individuals who scored low in Ho, high Ho individuals were more suspicious, more anger-prone, and more irritable (e.g., Hardy & Smith, 1988; Smith & Frohm, 1985; Suarez & Williams, 1989). Furthermore, when placed in circumstances of interpersonal conflict, high Ho individuals displayed more anger, exhibited more hostile behavior, and were more disparaging of others (Hardy & Smith, 1988; Pope, Smith, & Rhodewalt, 1990; Smith, Sanders, & Alexander, 1990).

Paper presented at the 65th Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, April 29 - May 1, 1993.

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Buri, Cooper, Richtsmeier, and Komar (1991) extended the deleterious interpersonal implications of high Ho to the role of parents in the emotional-psychological development of their children. These researchers reported that high Ho parents were judged by their adolescents to be more authoritarian in their exercise of authority within the home; furthermore, these adolescents of high Ho parents were more likely to exhibit low levels of global self-esteem (see also Buri, Cooper, Kircher, Richtsmeier, & Komar, 1992). In the present study, a negative relationship between parents' Ho and their older adolescents' self-esteem (SE) is hypothesized.

A further investigative area of interest in the present study derives from the symbolic interactionist proposition that one's self-concept is primarily affected by social interactions *to the extent* and *in the way* that one perceives those interactions (Cooley, 1902; James, 1890; Mead, 1934). In the words of Kagan (1984): "The child's personal interpretation of experience, not the event recorded by camera or observer, is the essential basis for the formation of and change in beliefs, wishes, and actions" (p. 241).

In light of this symbolic interactionist view within the context of the present study, one might expect parental Ho to have varied effects upon adolescents' SE depending upon the perception of that Ho by the adolescents. One particular "perception" that has been implicated by numerous cognitive theorists (e.g., Beck, 1979; Ellis & Harper, 1975; McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1981; McKay & Fanning, 1987) in the development and perpetuation of low SE is *high standards*: individuals who hold high personal standards for performance are more prone to low SE. It has generally been suggested that those with high standards have difficulty living up to those standards and there-

fore experience more failure than do those who do not hold such high standards. The results for those individuals who hold high standards for themselves are therefore lower levels of SE. However, in the present study, *high standards* by adolescents were investigated as a cognitive moderator of the effects of parental Ho upon SE. Specifically, the present study investigated whether the SE levels of adolescents having high personal standards are more vulnerable to the deleterious effects of parental Ho than are the SE levels of those who do not hold high standards of personal performance.

Method

Subjects

The participation of 125 college students (as part of an introductory psychology course requirement) and both their parents (through mailed questionnaires) was requested. The responses of 23 students were eliminated from the present analyses because their parents were divorced or separated. An additional three subjects were excluded from the study because of incomplete or inadequate participation. Finally, 30 students were eliminated because at least one of their parents declined the opportunity to participate. The remaining 69 students from intact families (34 females, 35 males) and both their parents participated through questionnaire responses.

Materials and Procedure

Each college-age participant completed three questionnaires which were presented in randomized order: a) a global self-esteem scale, b) a questionnaire to measure high personal standards, and c) a demographic information sheet. Each parent was asked to complete the Cook and Medley (1954) Ho Scale.

Each of the research participants was told that we were investigating

factors that are believed to influence SE in adolescents. They were instructed that there were no right or wrong answers and that all of their responses were anonymous; therefore they were encouraged to respond to each item as honestly as possible. They were also instructed not to spend too much time on any one item since we were interested in their first reaction to each statement. They were also reminded of the importance of responding to every item on the questionnaires.

Global self-esteem. Each participant completed the Tennessee Self-Concept Scale (TSCS; Fitts, 1965), which consists of 100 self-descriptive statements to which subjects responded on a 5-point scale ranging from *completely false* of me (1) to *completely true* of me (5). The TSCS is a widely-used research tool for SE studies (Marsh & Richards, 1988; Mitchell, 1985; Roid & Fitts, 1988). The Total Positive SE Score was derived for each participant in the present study. As operationalized by Fitts,

> ...persons with high scores tend to like themselves, feel that they are persons of value and worth, have confidence in themselves, and act accordingly. People with low scores are doubtful about their own worth; see themselves as undesirable;...and have little faith or confidence in themselves (p. 2).

Fitts (1965) reported a test-retest reliability for the Total Positive Score of .92. An internal consistency estimate of .92 for this Total Score was reported by Stanwyck and Garrison (1982). Also, Roid and Fitts (1988) reported a coefficient alpha value of .94 for this Total Score scale. Sample TSCS items are: "I am an important person to my friends and family" and "I am not the person that I would like to be."

High standards. The student participants were also asked to complete Carver and Ganellen's (1983) Attitudes Toward Self Scale (ATS). One subscale of the ATS was constructed to measure individuals' tendencies to hold high expectations for themselves (High Standards). Scores on this High Standards subscale were used in the present study. Carver, Ganellen, and Behar-Mitrani (1985) reported test-retest reliabilities over a six-week interval of .67 for this subscale. Sample High Standard items are: "It would be hard for anyone to do as well as I want myself to do" and "I seem to judge myself more strictly than others judge themselves."

Demographic information. The student participants also provided information concerning a) their gender, b) their age, c) whether one of their parents had died, and d) whether their parents were divorced or separated.

Hostility. Copies of the Ho scale (Cook & Medley, 1954) were mailed home to each of the parents along with a letter explaining the research project and soliciting their participation. A stamped envelope for convenience in returning the completed questionnaires was also included with the questionnaires and the letter.

The Ho scale consists of 50 items from the MMPI. This scale was originally constructed to discriminate teacher rapport with students. Cook and Medley reported an internal consistency of .86. More recently, Smith and Frohm (1985) reported a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of .82. Test-retest reliabilities reported by Barefoot, Dahlstrom, and Williams (1983) and Shekelle, Gale, Ostfeld, and Paul (1983) were both approximately r = .85. Sample Ho items are: "I think a great many people exaggerate their misfortunes in order to gain sympathy and help of others" and "People often disappoint me."

Results

The intercorrelations among the variables investigated in the present study are presented in Table 1. Adolescent SE was inversely related to

Table 1

Intercorrelations for All Variables

	1	2	3	4
(1) Self-Esteem	1.00			
(2) Hostility/Mother	-.302**			
(3) Hostility/Father	-.294*	.435**		
(4) High Standards	.069	.110	.057	

*p < .025 **p < .01

mothers' Ho (r = -.302, p < .01) and to fathers' Ho (r = -.294, p < .025). Surprisingly, however, the bivariate correlation of High Standards with SE was not significant (r = .069).

Likely of greater import in the present study, however, are the moderating effects of adolescents' High Standards upon the relationship of fathers' Ho to SE. In moderated regression analyses, the dependent variable (i.e., SE) is first regressed on the predictor variables (i.e., mothers' and fathers' Ho), then on the moderator variable (i.e., High Standards), and finally on the predictor by moderator interactions. Any increment in R^2 resulting from the last step in the analyses is evidence of the moderator effect. As can be seen in table 2, taking the moderating effects of High Standards into consideration

greatly enhances the ability to predict SE from the fathers' Ho scores [$F(1,63) = 8.92$, $p < .01$].

Table 2

Summary of Moderated Regression Analyses

	Dependent Variable = Self-Esteem		
Independent Variables	*F(1,63)*	*p*	*Partial* r^2
Mothers' Hostility	7.60	<.01	.091
Fathers' Hostility	2.75	*ns*	.033
High Standards	0.92	*ns*	.011
Mothers' Hostility X High Standards	0.36	*ns*	.004
Fathers' Hostility X High Standards	8.92	<.01	.107

Discussion

As expected, parental Ho for both mothers and fathers was inversely related to adolescent SE. Unexpected, however, was the finding that the variable of High Standards was not significantly related to adolescent SE. Ever since James (1890) suggested that SE is strongly influenced by the matching of personal aspirations with personal accomplishments, the establishment of personal standards that are not excessively high has been encouraged. However, the present findings suggest that maintaining high standards for one's personal performance is not by itself strongly predictive of SE. It is

interesting to note that the present results are consistent with investigations of the relationship of High Standards to depression (e.g., Carver & Ganellen, 1983; Carver, LaVoie, Kuhl, & Ganellen, 1988). Together these previous findings and the present results suggest that the effect of maintaining high personal standards upon such psychological/emotional variables as SE and depression may not always be a direct one. In fact, subsequent analyses in the present study suggest an intriguing avenue for consideration.

As noted in the moderated regression analyses, once the effects of parents' Ho and adolescents' High Standards upon SE had been partialled out, the Fathers' Ho x High Standards interaction still accounted for a significant proportion of SE variance, augmenting R^2 by nearly 11%. Clearly adolescents' High Standards moderated the relationship between parental Ho and adolescent SE; namely, the deleterious effects of parental Ho on adolescent SE were heightened for those adolescents who held high standards for their behavior. The fact that in the present study the variable of High Standards was not directly related to adolescent SE, but instead, seemed to serve a moderating function between parental Ho and SE strongly suggests that there is a need for greater understanding of these cognitive systems that moderate the actual processing and interpretation of parents' behaviors. As Baumrind (1991) stated:

> [T]he manner in which the child encodes or represents the parenting behavior may change the effects of the parenting behavior on adolescents.... Thus depending upon how the parents' behavior is construed by the child, the same parenting behavior could have different effects due to the cognitive activity of the child (p. 157).

Further investigation of cognitive variables that may serve such a moderating

effect is much needed.

One apparently curious finding in the present study was that adolescent High Standards moderated the effects of Fathers' Ho upon SE, but not the effects of Mothers' Ho upon SE. In fact, however, the present results may be seen as consistent with the findings of previous research in this area. For example, Smith et al. (1990) reported that in a marriage context Ho was much more predictive of overt indices of hostility for men than for women. They found that high Ho men were more apt to respond to situations of interpersonal conflict with anger, blame, and hostile behavior than were low Ho men. For the women, however, such strong differences between high Ho and low Ho individuals were not found. Thus the psychological disposition of Ho appears to affect the overt behavioral and emotional expressions of men more than those of women. In the present study, one might have logically expected that when apprehended through cognitions of high personal expectations, the deleterious effects of Ho would be greater when the Ho characteristics were manifested more overtly (for Fathers' Ho) than when they were less explicitly expressed (for Mothers' Ho); and it is just such an expectation that the present findings support.

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